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Pin Point

PIN POINT, A NEGRO COMMUNITY ABOUT NINE MILES southeast of Savannah, is scattered over some twenty or thirty acres on a peninsula overlooking Shipyard Creek. Many of the small wooden cabins are neatly whitewashed and are half hidden by shrubbery and spreading oaks. Flowers and vegetables are planted in the most advantageous sunny spots near the houses and most of the yards are enclosed by picket fences, giving a cozy and pleasant privacy. The lanes, little more than wagon tracks, twist in and out and across the settlement. The informal and haphazard scattering of the houses, with high shrubbery bordering the lanes, gives an effect that is pleasing and unusual.

Pin Point has a church, a pavilion on the tidewater creek, and a crab cannery. The men and women who do not work as domestic servants at the nearby country places find employment in the crab cannery or fish and crab and shrimp for themselves. The life is quiet, soothed by the smell of the salt marsh.

It is only when some great excitement takes place, a stirring religious service, a dance at the community pavilion, a death,[37b, c] or some scandal concerning a neighbor, that quiet Pin Point bestirs itself. Recently, one of the fishermen ventured into the foreign waters of the Ogeechee about ten miles distant and there he was almost devoured by an alligator. All that was left of him, "the ham," was given a burial [3] amid the loud lamentations of his relatives and neighbors.

The people are, almost without exception, black or dark

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skinned, proud, upstanding and loyal, suspicious of strangers but generous and trusting to friends (Plate VIII, IX, X). Most of the very old inhabitants have died in the past decade, so that to have reached the age of sixty places a man or woman in the patriarchal class. The grown people between twenty-five and thirty, are still close to the traditions and beliefs in which they have been reared. Firmly believing in the Bible, they still are aware of other beliefs and customs handed down by their parents and grandparents.

A pleasant, intelligent woman * of about forty-five chatted with us. "Cose, det is duh will ub God, but dey do say jis duh same wen a pusson die, 'Maybe somebody fix em'[15] aw 'I sho know dat uhmun wuz rooted.' I ain nebuh bought no powduh muhsef but jis day befo yestuhdy a uhmun frum Tatemville wuz right yuh tuh dis house sellin High John duh Conqueruh fuh fifty cent an she sho say it would bring yuh powuhful good luck, but I ain hab fifty cent.[8]

"Cose, it ain good tuh fool much wid dem tings, but yuh sho hab tuh be keahful not tuh let no enemy git hole uh yuh haiah combins cuz dey say dey sho could fix yuh den."[10] She laughed a little uneasily. "Ef yuh dream ub a snake dassa enemy neahby too, but ef yuh weah a snake skin roun yuh wais, it good fuh wut ail yuh.[504.] * An ef uh enemy come tuh yuh house an yuh dohn wahn im deah no mo, yuh jis take duh bruhm an sweep out quick attuh im. Den sprinkle a lill salt on duh flo weah his foot track bin an sweep em all out duh doe an he sho wohn come back no mo."

At this point in her narrative a swarm of barefoot children, black and with shining eyes, clustered around us. One and all were eating crabs, biting into the soft part of the body shell or cracking a claw with strong white teeth. Word had evidently just gone out that some excitement was brewing. Strangers had come and were talking to "Miz Minnie." If anything was going on they didn't want to miss it.

* *Minnie Dawson, Pin Point.*

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115 (351) the house. Across the road to the left was a field which had been planted in corn.

Charles, a medium-sized, intelligent man, very black of skin and rather small-featured, talked to us about his people.

(165) "Dey is long libin people," he began. "Muh fathuh lib until he a hundud an muh mothuh wuz ninety wen she die. Muh gran, she name Louise an come frum Bahama Ilun.* She lib tuh hundud an fifteen. Das duh way dey do an I guess I'll do duh same."

178 Did the people around Harrington believe in the old customs the way his mother and grandmother had believed in them?

"Yes'm, dey sticks tuh em but duh times is changin an yuh (764) hab tuh change wid em. Duh unduhtakuh come now an mone lakly he bring yuh back tuh duh chuch an dey ain no watch an singin."

795 In the course of our talk he told us that the river baptisms were held by members of the local churches. "Yes'm, we still baptize in duh ribbuh," Charles said. "We hab one not (783) long ago. We hab tuh wait till a Sunday wen a ebb tide come at a good time, cuz it duh ebb tide wut carry yuh sin away."[83]

754 Charles confirmed what the other residents had told us regarding conjure.

"Well, dey's some belieb in cunjuh an some wut dohn. (753) Dey's lots wut say sickness ain natchul an somebody put sumpm down fuh yuh.[16] I ain belieb in it much muhsef but 829 dey's curious tings happen. Now, wen I wuz a boy deah's a root makuh wut lib yuh name Alexanduh. He wuz African an he say he kin do any kine uh cunjuh wut kin be done an he kin cuo any kine uh disease.[48] He wuz a small man, 789 slim an bery black. Alexanduh say he could fly.[68h, 68c] He (567)

*A number of slaves accompanied their masters from the West Indies to this country. It was also the custom for slave ships to stop at the Bahamas on route to America with a cargo.

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offered his services to another planter in that vicinity at $1.25 a head.[51] On St. Helena Island at least four of the planters were doctors.

Negroes seem to have been especially susceptible to cholera, "peripneumonia," and dysentery, or bloody flux, as it was most commonly called. When once cholera appeared among the Negroes, it usually could not be controlled until several had died. In 1852 and again in 1854 cholera swept off many of the best slaves on Louis Manigault's plantation on Argyle Island, Georgia. After these losses, Manigault bought 771 acres of "high land" on the Georgia main which he used partly for cholera camps and for the summer residence of the Negro children.[52] In 1855 when about fifty cases of cholera appeared among James Hamilton Couper's Hopeton plantation Negroes, he wrote to his son in alarm, "The causes I cannot discover, they [the Negroes] live at various settlements, are employed in every kind of work, and have the same food."[53]

Couper considered "peripneumonia" almost as alarming as cholera.[54] "Peripneumonia" was the ante-bellum term for pleuropneumonia, a combination of pleurisy and pneumonia. Although it did not occur in epidemics, it was nearly always fatal to the slaves. Although dysentery did not always appear among the plantation Negroes in a severe form, in 1857 Henry A. Middleton, Jr., lost forty of his people on Weehaw plantation, near Georgetown, from an epidemic of this disease.[55] After the epidemic,

[51] Phillips, *Plantation and Frontier*, I, 166.
[52] *Ibid.*, pp. 141, 143.
[53] Couper-Wylly Papers, March 9, 1855.
[54] *Ibid.*, April 13, 1857.
[55] Weehaw Plantation Book.

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the village was moved about three-fourths of a mile away to the pine woods and the houses built farther apart.

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Smallpox and yellow fever also caused the planters considerable alarm, although there were more widespread efforts to prevent these infectious diseases than others to which the Negroes were subject. The state quarantine laws greatly reduced the number of cases of yellow fever and the planter's general use of vaccine lessened the epidemics of smallpox. Henry A. Middleton, Jr.'s, Weehaw Plantation Book indicates that he regularly had the black children vaccinated.

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Although sea-island planters usually considered that the winter months were the hardest for the Negroes and the summer months for the whites, the Negroes also suffered from malaria, although not to the same extent as the whites. In 1857 James Hamilton Couper wrote to his son James that the illness of another son was "induced by the same state of the atmosphere which has caused a very general malaria of typhoid fever among the Negroes." For four weeks during this attack there was an average of forty ill in the plantation hospital.[56]

(758) (743)

567 165 764

The death of a trusted slave often brought a deal of sorrow into the planter's family. In recounting the deaths on the plantation in a letter to his son, Couper wrote in 1857:

> To myself personally the most painful loss has been that of poor old Sandy and his wife Joan. . . . I requested Mr. Brown to read the funeral service at his grave; and your mother, myself and the family attended. He was an honest, faithful and good man; and I part with him as with a devoted and tried friend. He was

[56] Couper-Wylly Papers, April 13, 1857.

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among my earliest playmates, and during my whole life his attachment never varied. I shall gratify myself by placing a stone on his grave.[57]

INFANT WELFARE

The children's diseases were sometimes more disastrous than cholera or dysentery, despite the general precautions observed in caring for the plantation children. Planters usually insisted that the young be given special attention, and they also urged mothers to take proper care of themselves during pregnancy. Henry A. Middleton, Jr., would not permit any woman to work on his island lands in midwinter, and he immediately put *enceinte* women on half task until confinement. Every planter who had a hospital for his people insisted that the mothers come there for confinement, for there they could be better cared for and kept more quiet, but the women invariably preferred their own houses where they could gossip with their friends without restraint, and they usually managed, as Couper told Sir Charles Lyell, to be taken by surprise at home. Mothers were allowed a month of rest after confinement, an advantage rarely enjoyed by hard-working English peasants, and were not put at full tasks until the child was eight months old.

Doctors were seldom called at the confinement of a Negro woman,[58] for the woman's mistress herself seldom received such attention. In every group of plantation slaves there were one or more midwives listed on the plantation record as the "granny," or nurse, but known

[57] *Ibid.*

[58] MS in Hawks Letters, Library of Congress. Dr. J. M. Hawks to Esther Hawks, May 17, 1862, from Edisto Island: "In midwifery here, Drs. are not called, several births have occurred since I have been here all attended by the Negro women on the place."

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After eight months the child was put on a diet of vegetables, milk, and starches prepared, on the best managed plantation, by a special cook assigned to that task. On Weehaw plantation the children's allowance was given out every morning and cooked for them three times a day. They had vegetable soup every day and rice for dinner three times a week. While the potatoes lasted, they had potatoes every day for breakfast. During the winter they had molasses three times a week and milk on alternate days. After May first, however, they had molasses every day until milk was again used in winter.[62]

Despite this special attention, the proportion of children in the total number of deaths on Weehaw was high. In 1856 six out of eleven deaths were of infants under one year; in 1857 thirty-three out of forty deaths were of children under three years; in 1858 twelve out of fourteen were of children under two; in 1859 fourteen out of eighteen were of children under one; in 1860 thirteen out of twenty were of children. The causes of death as listed by the planter were as follows: diarrhea, pneumonia, debility, fever, spasms, lockjaw, dysentery, convulsions, accident, cholic, worms, and teething, with the largest number dying of lockjaw.

It must not be overlooked that the infant death rate among the whites was also high. Planters on St. Helena Island seem to have had as much difficulty in rearing their own children as those of their Negroes. The tombstones still standing in the cemeteries there show that parents sometimes lost four or five infants in succession. James A. Pope lost five children under six years of age

[62] *Ibid.*

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between 1833 and 1850. Within a period of five years William Jenkins lost three infants in succession.

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Data for the comparison of the death rate of whites and Negroes in the ante-bellum period are meager. The death rates for Charleston from 1830 to 1845 are as follows:

COMPARISON OF WHITE AND BLACK DEATH RATES IN CHARLESTON[a]

Year	Deaths Per Thousand	
	Whites	Blacks
1830	25.4	25.0
1831	21.4	26.3
1832	19.2	18.1
1833	18.2	17.9
1834	23.8	22.7
1835	23.2	21.5
1836	24.6	51.0
1837	21.1	21.4
1838	54.6	30.3
1839	33.4	25.6
1840	19.7	21.5
1841	15.2	22.3
1842	19.9	20.9
1843	16.4	30.4
1844	14.4	23.1
1845	18.9	20.6

The death rate of the whites was highest in 1838 when 54.6 persons per 1,000 died due to an epidemic of yellow fever, and lowest in 1841 when only 15.2 per 1,000 died, with an average for the sixteen years of 23.1 per 1,000. For the blacks the death rate was highest in 1836 when 51 per 1,000 died from an epidemic of cholera, and lowest in 1833 when only 17.9 per 1,000 died, with a general average of 24.8. The general average for the whites was lower by only 1.7 persons per 1,000 than the general average for the blacks. At the same time the average

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[a] J. D. B. DeBow, *Industrial Resources of the United States*, II, 294.

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000 death rate for the whites in Philadelphia from 1831 to 1840 was 23.2 per 1,000 and for the blacks 32.3 per 1,000.[84]

567 163 •165 The data available showing the ratio of births to deaths in the slave population of the sea-island region are likewise meager. Henry A. Middleton, Jr.'s, Weehaw Plantation Book records the births and deaths on his plantation from 1845 to 1860, as follows:

BIRTHS AND DEATHS ON WEEHAW PLANTATION, 1845-1860[85]

Year	Births	Deaths	Increase	Decrease
1845	21	24	..	3
1846	17	20	..	3
1847	28	16	12	..
1848	21	25	..	4
1849	22	20	2	..
1850	26	9	17	..
1851	18	19	..	1
1852	25	20	5	..
1853	29	22	7	..
1854	24	20	4	4
1855	25	59	..	34
1856	27	11	15	..
1857	22	40	..	18
1858	28	14	14	..
1859	20	18	2	..
1860	31	20	11	..
Total	384	357		

Beginning in 1845 with approximately 252, the slave population of Weehaw plantation showed after sixteen years an increase of births over deaths of 27, giving an increase of 10.7 per cent in the slave population. The number of deaths was highest in 1855 when an epidemic of whooping cough and measles among the children brought the number up to 59 and lowest in 1850 when

[84] *Ibid.*

[85] The high death rate is probably accounted for by the fact that planters usually included stillbirths in the numbers of deaths.

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only nine died. The number of births was greatest in 1860 with thirty-one and lowest in 1846 with only seventeen.

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Some idea of the child-bearing period of the slave women on St. Helena Island may be obtained from records in the John E. Fripp papers. One record gives a list of births from 1802 to 1860. Of the twenty women whose child-bearing records seem to have been complete, two women had ten children each; one, nine children; two, eight children; three, seven children; one, five children; four, four children; four, three children; and three, two children. It is possible to ascertain from the records at what age ten of these women first bore a child. Die, who was the youngest mother in the group, was fifteen when her first child was born; Jenny was seventeen; Daphney, eighteen; Jane, Judy, Matilda, Olive, and Martha, nineteen; Doll, twenty; and Hetty, twenty-two. Four of Hetty's ten children died in infancy as did four of Olive's eight children. The others lost from one to two children each.

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PLANTATION PROFITS AND LOSSES

James Hamilton Couper, who administered the James Hamilton estate for forty years, often said that the estate realized a higher percentage of profit on an investment in Schuykill River bonds issued by the city of Philadelphia than it did upon an investment in 600 slaves and 1,500 acres of Georgia seacoast farming land.[44] Data for a tract of 800 acres of this estate raising sea-island cotton have been preserved as follows:

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567 burden upon the parents, for the master provided for all
585 children alike. A violation of marriage vows was accom-
839 panied by no disgrace or punishment other than that in-
flicted by the master or by the church if the culprit were
a member. There seems to have been very little intimacy
567 between the white men and the Negro women on St.
(144) Helena Island. The northern missionaries found not
more than five or six mulattoes on the whole Island in
1861.

567 There were forces sufficiently strong to keep many
581 slaves faithful to their marriage vows. Chancellor Har-
per, of Charleston, called attention in 1854 to the fact that
slave marriages were often faithfully adhered to during
567 life.[22] In 1857 a sea-island planter, in recounting the
581 deaths among his people, mentioned with sadness that of
593 "poor old Sandy and his wife Joan." "The latter died
apparently of mere debility; and her husband, after watch-
• (165) ing until her death, went to bed at midnight, complaining
merely of a sore throat, and expired the next evening with-
out any one suspecting that he was seriously ill." The
planter concluded that the faithful old man had died of
"mental depression, operating on a feeble constitution."[23]
On Edisto Island there still lives "Old Jeff," born in
slavery, who, although as devoted to his wife as Sandy,
lived on after her death. Every day he went to her grave
to mourn and there he slept at night. After several
months his friends became alarmed at his behavior. Upon
being questioned he explained that he intended to dig up

[22] "Memoir on Slavery," DeBow, *Industrial Resources of the United States*, II, 219.

[23] Couper-Wylly Papers, James Hamilton Couper to James Couper, April 13, 1857.